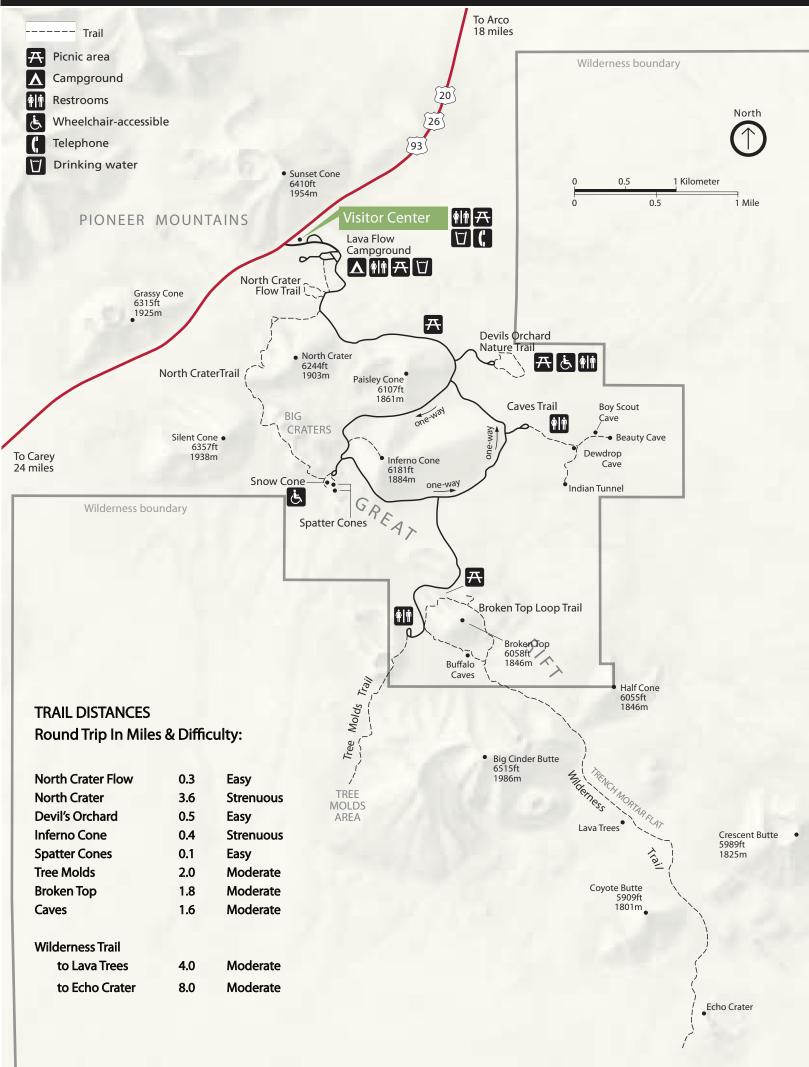
Craters of the Moon National Monument and Preserve







PACK IT IN - PACK IT OUT



Please help us reduce the amount of waste we send to the landfill by taking recyclabe materials home with you or to our recycling center in the campground.

All lava rock is sharp and abrasive. Taking a fall will almost certainly result in cuts and scrapes. When traveling on the lava, stay on the trails, slow down, and use caution.

Sturdy shoes and long pants are recommended.



Craters of the Moon

National Park Service
Bureau of Land Management
U.S. Department of the Interior



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Hiking Trails

To venture onto the lavas of Craters of the Moon is to enter another world: black lava twisted and pulled like taffy, mounds and mountains of frothy cinders that crunch as you climb, and cold, dark, and damp lava tube caves. It is also surprising to note how much life makes a home in this harsh volcanic terrain and high desert environment. Keep your eyes peeled for these features and many more as you hike in what President Calvin Coolidge described as a "weird and scenic landscape, peculiar to itself."

NORTH CRATER FLOW 0.3 mi/.5 km, easy

This loop trail takes you onto the North Crater Flow, a pahoehoe flow that spilled from the North Crater vent about 2,200 years ago. Signs along the trail introduce other typical features: pressure ridges, squeeze ups, aa lava, and rafted blocks.

NORTH CRATER 3.5 mi/5.8 km, strenuous

This trail is especially interesting for its variety. The trail traverses North Crater and drops into the crater mouth, the vent for the North Crater flow. Notice that the northwest flank of North Crater is missing. An eruption tore the wall apart, and a series of lava flows rafted the fragments away. The trail continues to the rim of Big Craters before descending to the Spatter Cones. If you have two vehicles, leave one at the Spatter Cones parking lot to avoid hiking back on the same trail. For a shorter alternative, park at the Spatter Cones parking lot and hike a steep ½ mile roundtrip to see Big Craters.

DEVIL'S ORCHARD 0.5 mi/.8 km, easy

This paved loop trail explores an area of cinder beds scattered with pieces of the North Crater wall. Exhibits along the trail describe the difficult challenge the National Park Service faces in trying to protect this fragile volcanic environment. This trail is wheelchair accessible.

Trail Descriptions

All distances are roundtrip.

INFERNO CONE 0.5 mi/.8 km, strenuous

The trail to the top of Inferno Cone is steep, but rewards you with panoramic views of the Great Rift, Snake River Plain, and the surrounding mountain ranges. On clear days you may see the Teton Range, 100 miles to the east.

SPATTER CONES 274 ft/84 m, easy

Like Yellowstone's Old Faithful, the spatter cone chain at Craters of the Moon best symbolizes the essence of this special place. Created during a dwindling stage of an eruption, the spatter cones formed as hot lumps of lava were thrown a short distance into the air only to fall back to earth around a small central vent. As the still molten blobs landed on top of each other, they cooled and adhered to form the walls of these miniature volcanoes. There are two trails to explore here: a fully accessible trail to the vent of "Snow Cone" and a short trail to the top of one of the larger spatter cones.

BROKEN TOP LOOP 1.8 mi/3 km, moderate

The Broken Top Loop Trail is one of the most outstanding trails within Craters of the Moon. Along its 2-mile length you can observe nearly every type of volcanic feature characteristic of the basaltic eruptions that created this unearthly landscape. A trail guide with descriptions of these features is available at the trailhead box. If you wish to explore Buffalo Cave, located next to sign #8, don't forget to bring a flashlight and watch your head.

TREE MOLDS 2 mi/3 km, moderate

This trail winds through shrubs and stands of limber pine before reaching the edge of the Blue Dragon Flow. While still molten, this lava flow knocked down and ignited trees. The charred tree trunks left impressions on the lava rock. In some places, the trees remained standing as the lava encased them, leaving vertical molds in the cooling lava.

WILDERNESS TRAIL 8 mi/12.8 km, moderate

You will have a sense of solitude as you travel into the Craters of the Moon Wilderness. The trail begins at the Tree Molds parking lot and cuts across a lava flow close to Buffalo Cave. The trail follows the Great Rift south, past a series of "lava trees" and cinder cones before reaching the end at Sentinel Butte. Echo Crater, located 1 mile before Sentinel, is an excellent backpacking destination. Backcountry permits are required for overnight trips and are available free of charge at the visitor center.

THE CAVES TRAIL 1- 2 mi/1.3 km-2.6 km, moderate

On a summer day, the cool, dark lava tubes along the Caves Trail offer a radical change from the brilliant light and blistering heat on the surface. Indian Tunnel, one-half mile from the parking lot, is the largest cave and the easiest to visit. Skylights permit enough daylight to enter so that you do not need a flashlight. The other caves are pitch black, with uneven floors and low ceilings. Be sure you have a good flashlight for every person in your group, and that everyone is physically capable before exploring these caves. A hat and long pants may help protect your head and legs from the sharp rock.

A Word about Safety

The black lava captures and radiates the heat of the intense summer sun. An afternoon without steady wind is a rarity. Be prepared! Apply sun screen, wear a hat and carry plenty of water. Fill your water bottles before leaving the visitor center, as there is no running water along the Loop Drive. The lava surface is uneven and abrasive, so please stay on designated trails and wear hiking boots or sturdy shoes.